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# Volunteer Program

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Alaska Region

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# Volunteer Program

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## Introduction

Over the years, hundreds of people concerned with the conservation of natural resources have been interested in donating their time and services to assist the Forest Service. However, only a small percentage of those offers actually resulted in a service rendered due to some basic barriers.

Before the passage of the Volunteers in the National Forests Act in 1972, individuals who wanted to donate time and services were not covered under the Federal Employee's Compensation Act or the Federal Tort Claims Act. Second, many people needed some assistance to defray the incidental costs of travel or meals involved in performing donated services. This Act now enables the Forest Service to accept voluntary services as well as providing the authority to reimburse the individual for certain personal expenses. Thus the Forest Service is able to utilize and recognize those who want to give their time and skills to public service.

Volunteers are accepted from the public without regard to race, creed, religion, age, sex, color, national origin, marital status, or handicap. They are selected to participate in the program because they can fill an identified need.

Most of the activity in the Alaska Region occurs at the Forest and District level. Each program is a local operation with recruiting, selection, training, recognition, and the many other aspects of the program being handled where the work is done.

At the Regional Office level, the Regional Volunteer Coordinator monitors the Forest programs and assists the Forests as needed.

**Cover Photo:** Campground hosts on the Chugach National Forest

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## Objectives of the Program

The objectives of the National Forest Volunteer Program are:

- To provide a means for the Forest Service to legally accept and use the services of volunteers, either as individuals or groups, in furthering the mission of the Forest Service. This is done by utilizing volunteers to complement regular Forest Service staff in such areas as interpretive functions, resource management projects, administrative functions, and other activities administered by the Forest Service.
- To provide an experience for the volunteer that will be personally rewarding.
- To maintain and improve the level and quality of service to the public.

## Public Law

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### The Act

Under the Volunteers in the National Forests Act of 1972, Public Law 92-300, the Forest Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture is authorized the following:

- To recruit, train, and accept, without regard to the Civil Service classification laws, rules, or regulations, the services of individuals to serve without compensation. Volunteers may assist in any Forest Service program or activity. The Forest Service will sometimes provide for incidental expenses such as transportation, uniforms, lodging, and subsistence.
- The National Forest Volunteer will not be a Federal employee and will not be subject to employment and regulations per se. An agreement will be entered into between the Forest Service and the individual, stating what each has agreed upon.
- However, if a volunteer is sued for damage to property or for personal injury, including death, in relation to any activity within the scope of an assignment, the government will defend the volunteer under the provisions of the Tort Claims Act.
- Further, if the volunteer is injured while working within the scope of the agreement with the Forest Service, the volunteer is covered by the Federal Employee's Compensation Act.

# Alaska

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## The Alaska Region

Volunteering in the Alaska Region can be a unique and rewarding experience. Whether traveling by land, sea, or air, the magnificent scenery along the way is always impressive.

The Region is comprised of the two largest National Forests in the nation: The Tongass National Forest located in southeast Alaska, and about 600 miles away, the Chugach National Forest is located in southcentral Alaska.

The Tongass is the largest National Forest in the nation; with about 17 million acres, it is bigger than several of the smaller U.S. states. Due to its size, three administrative areas have been established: Chatham, headquartered in Sitka; Ketchikan, headquartered in Ketchikan; and Stikine, headquartered in Petersburg; each with its own Forest Supervisor. The Forest lies within the Alexander Archipelago and is considered by many to be the most beautiful part of Alaska. It is an area of dense rain forests, coastal towns, glaciers, and wooded islands.

The Chugach National Forest, comprised of 6 million acres, is headquartered in Anchorage, the largest urban area in Alaska. Over half of the State's population resides in this area. The Forest includes the Prince William Sound and parts of the Kenai Peninsula. The Chugach also encompasses spectacular country and is noted for its recreation attraction. The Kenai Peninsula is a major recreational playground for Anchorage residents.

Most areas of the Chugach and all areas of the Tongass receive heavy rainfall, making durable, waterproof raingear and rubber boots a must for outdoor work and recreation.

# Volunteer Information

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## Who May Apply

Anyone who wants to become involved may apply. Retirees, full and part-time workers, homemakers, students, senior citizens, and young people, whether serving as individuals or as members of organizations, have skills and talents that are often needed to accomplish projects through the Volunteer program. Volunteers under 18 years of age may participate with written consent of a parent or guardian. It is not required that volunteers be United States citizens.

## Type of Positions

Volunteer positions available in the Alaska Region include but are not limited to: forest interpreters, archaeology aides, fishery aides, wildlife habitat maintenance and protection aides, forestry aides, trail maintenance assistants, wilderness rangers, campground hosts, cooks, survey crew members, maintenance workers, clerical assistants, warehouse assistants, and information aides.

## Qualifications of Volunteers

The Forest Service officer authorized to negotiate and approve Volunteer agreements shall determine the necessary qualifications for each volunteer assignment. Office of Personnel Management qualification requirements **do not** apply. The Volunteer's health and physical condition must be sufficient to permit the use of the volunteered services without undue hazard to anyone. Volunteers may be required to obtain a medical examination at Forest Service expense.

Volunteers may assist in any program or activity, except they are not permitted to perform law enforcement activities or serve as collection officers.



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## **Enrollment**

Volunteers are enrolled by completing an agreement that has been negotiated between the applicant and the Forest Service supervisor. This agreement outlines the duties of the volunteer, what costs will be reimbursed (if any), and the responsibilities of the volunteer as well as the Forest Service. A volunteer should not begin work or travel on his/her assignment until an agreement has been signed by both parties. The agreement is the official instrument for authorizing reimbursement for any out-of-pocket expenses.

## **Tour of Duty**

A volunteer's tour of duty is negotiated between the volunteer and his/her supervisor. The tour (hours per day, per week) will depend on the volunteer's availability and Forest Service priorities. Volunteers may work full-time or only a few hours a week. They may also contribute a one-job, one-time service lasting from a few days to several weeks.

## **Reimbursement for Incidental Expense**

As already stated, volunteers will receive no salary from the Forest Service for the work they perform. However, on occasion the Forest Field Office may provide transportation, housing, a food allowance, and uniforms, depending upon the nature and location of the project and the availability of the skills of volunteers.

# **Supervision and Work Performance**

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## **Duties**

It is the responsibility of the volunteer to perform the work as described and agreed to in the Volunteer agreement. It is the responsibility of the Forest Service to provide adequate supervision and to recommend termination of a volunteer if his/her service is unsatisfactory.

## **Safety**

No job is so urgent or important it cannot be done safely. Therefore, depending on the nature of the assignment, volunteers may be instructed in the use of such things as hand and power tools, boat and aircraft operations, firearms, and vehicles. Safety equipment such as seat belts, hard hats, goggles, gloves, etc., are available and must be used.

## **Use of Equipment**

Most volunteers are issued tools and equipment, or other government property sometime during their tour. In order to drive a Government vehicle, a valid state driver's license is required as well as a U.S. Government motor vehicle operator's identification card.

Volunteers may be required to pay for lost or damaged equipment if it occurs as a result of negligence on the volunteer's part.

## **Injuries**

If a volunteer is injured on the job, the injury must be reported to the supervisor immediately. All accidents, regardless of how minor, must be reported. This is to protect the volunteer in case complications develop later from the injury. Common field work hazards are puncture wounds from sticks, scratches, small cuts and sprains from slipping off logs, rocks, etc.

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## Termination

The length of volunteer service must be agreed upon by the prospective volunteer and the Forest Service prior to finalizing an agreement. If for whatever reason premature cancellation of an agreement is necessary, this can simply be done by one party notifying the other party.

## Credit for Work Experience

Credit is given for volunteer work experience on the same basis as for paid experience. In order to receive credible experience, volunteers need to describe their volunteer experience on any job application when it represents qualifying experience for a specific job opportunity.



## Application Information

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### Where to Apply

Since most of the volunteer activity occurs at the Forest level, potential volunteers should send their applications to those geographic areas in which they are interested in working. Following are the addresses of the Forest Headquarter Offices:

Volunteer Coordinator  
Ketchikan Area, Tongass National Forest  
Federal Building  
Ketchikan, AK 99901  
Phone (907) 225-3101

Volunteer Coordinator  
Chatham Area, Tongass National Forest  
204 Siginaka Way  
Sitka, AK 99835  
Phone (907) 747-6671

Volunteer Coordinator  
Stikine Area, Tongass National Forest  
P.O. Box 309  
Petersburg, AK 99833  
Phone (907) 772-3841

Volunteer Coordinator  
Chugach National Forest  
201 East 9th Ave., Suite 206  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
Phone (907) 261-2500

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For general information on the Alaska Region's volunteer program contact:

Regional Volunteer Coordinator  
Alaska Region, U.S. Forest Service  
P.O. Box 21628  
Juneau, AK 99802-1628  
Phone (907) 586-8801

Once an applicant has been selected for a volunteer position, it is important for he/she to reach agreement with their contact person regarding the following: exact nature of the work, work schedule, duration of tour, what expenses will be reimbursed, and what the Forest Service will provide. The contact person should also give information on modes of transportation to the duty station, type of housing available, climate conditions, and appropriate clothing and raingear, plus any other information that will help to make the volunteer's experience worthwhile and rewarding.



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